

but if i get too far from writing
i'll still pick a fight with a wife
or mother or girlfriend or best friend,
or all on the same day,

just to have something to write about
and nothing else to do
but write about it.

THE ABRAHAM LINCOLN-LOG BRIGADE

at my kid's progressive pre-school
all the kids go potty
on a row of toilets
along one wall
without any stalls or doors.
frankly, i have always preferred
a bit of privacy,
but i realize that has a lot to do
with my upbringing
and that i was never in the armed forces.
so i'm glad my kids are growing up
much more comfortable with their bodily functions.

in fact, i would go one step further:

when i ask my wife whether the pre-school teachers
also do their duty upon a row of open stalls,
she says, "no, they have a couple of regular bathrooms
with doors and locks upstairs."
well, why are we adults not leading the way?
example is the best teacher, and i propose
that all of us, teachers and parents and guests alike,
at the pot-luck suppers and the halloween party
and the easter egg hunt should sit and shit
side-by-side as the festivities go on around us.

after all, i know progressive parents like ourselves
would want to avoid any taint of hypocrisy.

IN THE REIGN OF THE GOOD SHOGUN BONAPARTE

he seems like a bright kid,
so i assume he's kidding when he says,

"you know, london used to be all these
winding little streets

until napoleon built these big avenues
through all the old neighborhoods."
i say, "napoleon didn't get to london.
he missed the boat from ostend
when he ran into a delay at waterloo."
but now, from the look on his face,
i realize he is genuinely confused.
i try to be kind:

"it was paris.
the grand boulevards.
cut through the quartiers.
the baron haussman.
and it wasn't the same napoleon."

"let's see," he says, "london is in ..."
and he pauses.

"england. paris is in france.
they're only about an hour apart by plane,
but there's a channel in between.
their histories are intertwined,
but in recent centuries they've had separate governments
and spoken different languages."

he's grateful to have these matters clarified.
i go on to say a few words about dickens.

that evening i read in the papers
that on an international test
japanese students did even worse than americans
in geography.

THERE MAY BE SCOTTISH BLOOD ON MY FATHER'S SIDE

when i ask my former wife
how our son's contact lenses
are working out, she says,

"well, they really weren't a good idea
and then, the very day we were supposed
to have them double-checked by the eye-doctor,
he lost one of them."

"did you get your money back?"

"for one of them."

"were they insured?"